

A
SYNOPSIS
OF THE
TOWN OF ATKINSON LAND USE PLAN

Submitted to
North Carolina Coastal Resources Commission
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LAND USE CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

Atkinson is a small, rural community located in western Pender County at the junction of N. C. 53 and S. R. 1201. The Town was incorporated in 1909, and its population, though never large, has gradually increased since. Throughout the early part of the Town's history, agriculture formed the basis of the area's economy; the Seaboard Coastline Railroad ran regularly through the center of town establishing the town as a center for the marketing and transfer of the area's agricultural products. As railroad traffic has declined over the last 30 years, however, so has the ability of farming to provide a sound economic basis for the area. The railroad no longer runs through Atkinson and farming is no longer the principal occupation.

For the two decades between 1950 and 1970, there were not enough jobs available in the area to accommodate all of Atkinson's high school graduates and others seeking employment; agricultural activities were no longer able to absorb the new entrants into the labor force. Out-migration of the youth from the town resulted, leaving a disproportionate number of older people in the residual population. In the last five years, however, several new industries have opened in neighboring counties, particularly in adjacent New Hanover County. More of the labor force is now able to find jobs close enough to Atkinson to remain residents of the town. Furthermore, with increased employment opportunities, Atkinson is now seeing the return to residency of some of its natives who had formerly left town. The current trend is toward a more balanced age distribution than existed in years past.

It is estimated that presently one-half of the town's resident workers commute to neighboring counties for industrial jobs, one-eighth of the

labor force is employed in general commerce in Atkinson, only about one-fourth of the townspeople are employed in agriculture, and about one-eighth of the adult population of Atkinson is retired.

There is presently no zoning ordinance or subdivision regulation governing land use and development in Atkinson. Throughout the town limits, land use is mixed, with residential, commercial, recreational, public and institutional land occurring together in a random fashion. The area of town that serves as the central business district extends for one block east along NC 53, starting at the intersection of NC 53 and First Street. Located in this one block area are a gas pump, barber, beauty and fabric shops, a grocery store, insurance office, service station, grill, bank and a post office.

There are no major businesses or industries in Atkinson; the largest operation, a grill called Woody's Kitchen, employs only four people. In the last 10 years, several small businesses have been established including a garage-repair shop, a branch bank, the grill, and a fabric shop. A convenience store is presently under construction on NC 53, in the western section of town.

Atkinson's commerce can now fill most of the day-to-day shopping needs of its townspeople, including groceries, banking services, beauty needs, fabrics and the like. It is still necessary to leave town to obtain the professional services of doctors, lawyers, and dentists. Burgaw is the most common shopping place for professional services and for prescription drugs, large items such as furniture and appliances, and specialty goods and services.

The principal physical constraint on land use and development in Atkinson is imposed by the soils. The soils covering about 80 percent of the Town are moderately to poorly drained, causing problems, especially during heavy rains, with wetness and flooding. The area is characterized as well by a seasonably high water table which serves as the source of water supply for many private wells. Artificial canals are necessary for most any land use in the town to facilitate drainage and prevent ponding.

Ground water comprises the sole source of water supply in Atkinson, with water drawn primarily from either the surficial sands that cover the area or the underlying Peedee sands. Water of acceptable quality can be drawn from either of these aquifers, but both are recharged directly by rainfall and readily subject to contamination from surface pollutants or septic tanks. Some problems with pollution of ground water and surface waters (in ditches) have already been encountered and are attributed to septic tanks which are the only method of sewage disposal in the town.

MAJOR LAND USE ISSUES AND RESULTANT GROWTH POLICIES

In September 1975, a Town meeting was held in Atkinson for the purpose of assessing major land use problems and issues facing the Town and determining alternative growth policies for the future. Development in Atkinson has so far been unplanned and virtually unregulated. Because of its small size and very gradual growth, and its lack of diverse or incompatible land use, few problems have yet been encountered from the lack of planning and regulation. The occurrence of the pollution problems, however, and the awareness of other problems in other coastal communities, prompted Atkinson residents to take a close look at their goals for the town and at problems that will need to be overcome to achieve those goals.

Atkinson is a small rural town; its residents like it that way and want it to remain much the same in the future. In particular, residents want a well-rounded community with sufficient employment opportunities nearby that they can remain residents without extensive commuting. Since 1960, Atkinson has been growing at about .8 percent per year; between 1970 and 1975, that rate increased to .9 percent per year. The current population is estimated to be 340. Maintenance of the 1970 to 1975 rate of population increase, as desired, would result in a population of 375 in 1980, 405 in 1985, 440 in 1990 and 525 in 2000.

Pender County has recently initiated an economic development program part of which involves promoting in-county employment by expanding existing businesses and locating new markets and industries. The county goal is to achieve and support a population of 20,800 in 1985 and 25,000 in 1995, larger population increases than would be expected from a study of

historic trends. It is difficult now to predict with any accuracy the chances of new industrial growth in the Atkinson area or the total number of people that would move to Atkinson because of that growth. Because that growth is conceivable, however, in estimating the location of future population increases, the county has predicted a slightly larger 1985 population for Atkinson -- 425 persons.

Atkinson has never been the site of major industry. The location of industry in the town is constrained initially by the limited amount of land in the jurisdiction and the few public services available. Many townspeople feel that the location of industry within the jurisdiction would tend to change the rural atmosphere now present and would force accompanying residential growth to occur outside. The limited tax base and low population limit the public services that can cost effectively be offered to residents; extension of services to residential growth outside the town limits would increase per unit costs even more. For that reason, most townspeople would prefer to restrict any industrial development to areas outside the town but, in full agreement with county policy, encourage any resultant residential development to be located within.

Only about half of the land in Atkinson is developed for urban purposes and even less of it is actually built upon; most of the remaining land in the town is in forest or farmland. There is an adequate amount of land, therefore, to accommodate the population increases projected by either the Town or the County. The major issue involved with growth is the density at which the yet undeveloped land should be developed to accommodate the increases.

The septic tank problems in the town are not now widespread; only isolated water supplies have been found to be contaminated. Density in Atkinson is quite low, even in more urbanized parts. The current pollution problems can probably be attributed as much to the improper installation, location or maintenance of the disposal systems as to the natural limitations of the soils.

As part of the federal 201 facilities planning program, a water and sewer plan was prepared for the town. The local cost of the trunk lines and treatment facilities alone, when distributed among the town's small population, is high; the availability of federal and state funds to supplement the town's expense is uncertain at this time. Even with outside funding, the establishment of a sewer and water system would be difficult; without that funding, inconceivable.

In order to assess the extent of the pollution problems so as to begin solving them, the town is requesting assistance from the County Health Department. The Town proposes evaluation of each septic tank system in the town, with repair or reinstallation required for each one found to be defective. The authority for granting permits for installing septic tanks rests with the county; Atkinson will encourage the county to develop new or revised septic tank regulations in the future, adequate to prevent recurrence of the pollution problems. Meanwhile, the town will consider the necessity for establishing zoning or subdivision regulations for the Town requiring lots to be sufficiently large to accommodate on-site sewage disposal systems and water supplies safely.

Because of the limited tax base in the town and the lack of a substantial increase in that tax base foreseen in the near future, the kinds

of services the town will be able to offer will remain limited. The townspeople in the Town meeting gave highest priority to the development of supervised municipal park and recreation facilities. In particular, residents would like to have established a center for the community recreation, meeting and fund raising activities that currently take place at random locations in the town. A recreation committee has been established to study the feasibility of such a recreation program, and to obtain equipment for the town park.

In order to make its position clear on these and related issues, the Town of Atkinson has established the following set of Objectives and Standards to guide future land use:

OBJECTIVES AND STANDARDS OF ATKINSON

Objective: Atkinson will promote the continued gradual development of the Town as a rural, family-oriented community.

- Standards:
- 1) Public services, including police and fire protection, solid waste collection, and medical and recreational facilities will be planned for a population of 375 in 1980, 440 in 1990 and 525 in 2000.
 - 2) The Town will encourage the location of future residential growth within the municipal jurisdiction; public services supported by the Town with the exception of fire protection will be provided only within the existing municipal boundaries.
 - 3) The Town will encourage the location of professional and service businesses within the municipal jurisdiction.

- 4) The Town will discourage the location of industry within the municipal jurisdiction, but will encourage light industry location in more urbanized areas of Pender County.
- 5) The Town will cooperate with Pender County, the Cape Fear Council of Governments and the Community Development Committee in order to coordinate planning efforts and facilitate implementation of Town policies.

Objective: The Town of Atkinson will continue to try to eliminate any health problems caused by the physical limitations of the soils and drainage system.

- Standards:
- 1) In order to correct any improperly functioning septic systems, the town will seek the assistance of County Health Department personnel to determine the cause and extent of ground and surface water pollution.
 - 2) The Town will seek County cooperation in assuring the proper maintenance of the drainage ditch system.

Objective: The Town of Atkinson will attempt to provide public recreation facilities for all its population.

- Standards:
- 1) A recreation committee will be formed in order to survey the recreational needs of the Town and to establish priorities for recreational facility development.
 - 2) The Town will endeavor to establish a Town Center to house recreational, meeting and fund raising activities.

LAND CLASSIFICATION

The Land Classification System (LCS) was established by the N. C. Land Policy Council for localities to use to identify the most appropriate general uses of various kinds of land and to make a statement to state and federal authorities, as well as local residents, on where and to what density growth is desired.

The LCS includes the following five categories of land:

1. Developed -- Lands where existing population density is moderate to high and where there is a variety of land uses which have the necessary public services.
2. Transitional -- Lands where local government plans to accommodate moderate to high density development during the following ten-year period and where necessary public services will be provided to accommodate that growth.
3. Community -- Lands where low density development is grouped in existing settlements or will occur in such settlements during the following ten-year period and will not require extensive public services now or in the future.
4. Rural -- Lands whose highest use is for agriculture, forestry, mining, water supply, etc., based on their natural resource potential. Also, lands for future needs not currently recognized.
5. Conservation -- Fragile, hazardous and other lands necessary to maintain a healthy natural environment and necessary to provide for the public health, safety and welfare.

Current land use in Atkinson would allow a separation of the town into two of the above classes -- Community (developed) and Rural (undeveloped).

There are no Areas of Environmental Concern to warrant the Conservation category. Because the population increase projected for 1985 is low, most of that increase could probably be accommodated within the already developed parts of town. Because pollution problems have been encountered in the built-up areas, however, the maintenance of low density in the future will be necessary. In order to maintain sufficiently low density, additional land within the jurisdiction may need to be developed. For that reason, the entire town is classified Community. Specifically, the community classification indicates a policy determination that the density of development in the future will remain sufficiently low that no municipal water or sewer facilities will be required.

Addendum

Additions and Revisions

- 1) Page 4, paragraph 2, line 8 --

Delete "as desired" and insert in its place "as the participants in the Town Meeting voted to try to do,".

- 2) Page 7, paragraph 2, line 2 --

After "...Town of Atkinson ..." insert "in direct response to the consensus of opinion expressed in the Town Meeting,"

- 3) Page 10, paragraph 1 --

Line 8 is rewritten as follows:

"The entire town is designated Community; Atkinson is also designated a Community in the Pender County Plan."

- 4) Page 10, paragraph 1 --

The last sentence is rewritten as follows:

"Specifically, the significance of the Community designation is the policy determination that the density of development in the future, that is the average lot size per dwelling unit, will, by ordinance if necessary, remain sufficiently low that no municipal water or sewer facilities will be required."

- 5) Page 10 (and 11), Add to bottom of page:

"Implementation of the Atkinson Plan will involve 1) assessing the extent of the pollution problems and the possible means for solving them and preventing their recurrence- 2) trying to establish a balanced recreation program and develop better

recreation and meeting facilities in the Town Park, and 3) assessing the need for land use regulations (zoning, subdivision and septic tank) and coordinating as feasible their enforcement with the County.

Future planning in Atkinson will be coordinated with on-going land use and economic development planning in the county; revisions to the Atkinson Plan will be made in regular Town Board meetings as necessary."

This Synopsis is being delivered to every postal boxholder in the town; copies of the maps it contains can be obtained upon request at the Town Hall.

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